

PART 2. Environmental Assessment



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1. Purpose and Need

Purpose

In November 1999, Congress authorized the National Park Service (NPS) to evaluate the feasibility of including all or part of the Gaviota Coast in the National Park System (P.L. 106-113, 113 Stat. 1535, 1537 - Nov. 29, 1999). The NPS has prepared this feasibility study (also known as a Special Resource Study) of the Gaviota Coast to provide information to Congress on the significance of these resources, and on the suitability and feasibility of designating the area or some portion of it as a unit of the National Park System. The study was prepared following the process established by the National Park System New Area Studies Act (P.L. 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5). This law requires that these studies be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in order to identify and analyze the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences of each of the alternatives considered in the Feasibility Study.

NPS policies require that EIS's (rather than EA's) be prepared for Special Resource Studies (feasibility studies) when the following conditions are met:

(1) The resource being studied meets the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System (i.e. it is nationally significant and is deemed feasible and suitable for inclusion in the system)

(2) One of the alternatives being considered is designation as a National Park System unit, even if that is ultimately not the recommendation of the Secretary (Director's Order #12 and Handbook).

An EA has been prepared for this study because the area does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System, and designation as a National Park System unit is not being considered.

At the beginning of the study process, the NPS initiated an Environmental Assessment (EA) process along with the Feasibility Study to provide a forum for public input and to evaluate potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences. Through the initial public scoping process, it became apparent that the study process was generating controversy. At the same time, the NPS adopted new policies for environmental impact analysis and decision-making which required that Environmental Impact Statements (EIS's), rather than EAs, be prepared to accompany Special Resource Studies that consider additions to the National Park System. Because of the controversy and the policy changes, the NPS determined that an EIS was likely to be necessary. The study team then took the actions necessary for the preparation of an EIS, including publication of a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register, and re-opening of the scoping process. A more detailed discussion of the public involvement process can be found in the Consultation and Coordination section of this report.

In Fall, 2002, the NPS completed the feasibility analysis process, and concluded that NPS management of the Gaviota Coast was not feasible. Alternatives that include NPS management are therefore not presented and evaluated in the study report. According to NPS policy, an EA is sufficient for a Special Resource Study if the area does not meet the NPS standards for inclusion in the National Park System, and if no NPS alternatives are considered. This report therefore includes an EA, rather than an EIS.

Need

The NPS was first contacted by proponents of protection of the Gaviota Coast in 1994, when the Audubon Society and others organized a Coastal Preservation Conference focused on the Gaviota Coast, and invited an NPS representative to speak. Various groups concerned about expanding urbanization, displacement of agriculture, reduced

public beach access, and stressed coastal watersheds and marine ecosystems, worked together over the next few years to develop a conservation strategy for the Gaviota Coast. One of their actions was to seek Congressional authorization for the NPS to study the area's potential as a unit of the National Park System.

In 1999, NPS staff conducted several site visits to preliminarily evaluate the significance of the area's resources, and to meet with a range of area stakeholders and elected officials. NPS staff concluded that the area was worthy of further NPS study, because of its assemblage of natural and cultural resources, and visitor experience and educational opportunities. In mid-1999, in response to the local interest and endorsement of the study concept from local and state government agencies, elected officials and Congressional representatives, the NPS included this area in its annual list of areas recommended for study for potential inclusion in the National Park System, as authorized by the National Park System New Area Studies Act [P.L. 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5 (b)(1)]. This list was included in legislation passed by Congress in November, 1999, thus authorizing a feasibility study of the Gaviota Coast.



Barnsdall - Rio Grande gas station, NPS photo



Haskell's Beach, NPS photo

2. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

Introduction

This section of the Environmental Assessment (EA) describes the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences (also called impacts or effects) of implementing the two alternatives considered in the Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study.

The following factors should be considered in reviewing this Environmental Assessment:

- Because the alternatives in the Feasibility Study are conceptual in nature, the analysis of environmental consequences in this EA is necessarily quite general. The NPS can only make reasonable projections of likely impacts.
- The NPS is neither the decision-maker nor the implementing organization for any of the actions proposed under either of the alternatives. The alternatives recognize the prerogative of individuals and organizations to choose whether and how to implement elements of the alternatives. Impacts therefore may vary widely depending on how the responsible organization or individual chooses to implement these measures.
- Impacts associated with actions recommended in Alternative 2 are conditional based on the goals and priorities that would be established in the local community upon implementation of the suggested actions.
- Action items identified in the alternatives may require additional environmental analysis before they can be undertaken by the various implementing agencies and organizations.
- Compliance with federal and state biological and cultural resource laws and regulations, and local zoning and permitting regulations and processes would be required for any actions under either of the alternatives.
- Not all of the actions under Alternative 2 may be possible or practical in the near term. This alternative is presented as a menu of programs and tools that could be pursued. Some may be able to be implemented quickly, others may take longer, and the community may choose not to implement certain elements.
- Current economic conditions limit the potential in the near term for increased local, state and federal funding for conservation and recreation. Some initiatives may not be financially feasible in the near term, while others may require more creative approaches to funding.

ORGANIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This documentation of the affected environment and analysis of impacts is organized by impact topic. Under each impact topic (land use, biological resources, cultural resources, etc.), the affected environment is discussed, followed by an analysis of the environmental consequences of each alternative.

Regulations and policies that guide and limit management actions are presented in Table 8.

An analysis of how each alternative meets the goals of NEPA and the goals that were established at the beginning of the alternatives process can be found at the end of this EA.

METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYZING CONSEQUENCES

Consequences are determined by comparing future conditions under each alternative with the existing baseline conditions, and by comparing future conditions under Alternative 2 to the future conditions under Alternative 1 (the “no action” alternative). The analysis includes consideration of the context, intensity, duration, and cumulative effects of the alternatives. The NPS based this

analysis and conclusions on a review of existing literature, information provided by experts within the NPS and other organizations; analysis of case studies of existing programs in other locations, and the professional judgment of the study team members.

The following definitions, standards, and guidelines will be used in describing consequences:

- **Context** : Impacts are considered at their local, regional, or national context as appropriate.
- **Intensity**: For the purposes of this analysis, intensity or severity of the impact is defined as:
 - **Negligible** - Impact to the resource or socioeconomic environment is at the lower level of detection; no discernible effect
 - **Minor** - Impact is slight, but detectable; impacts present, but localized, and not expected to have an overall effect.
 - **Moderate** - Impact is readily apparent; clearly detectable and could have appreciable effect on the resource or socioeconomic environment
 - **Major** - Impact is severely adverse or exceptionally beneficial; would have a substantial, highly noticeable influence on the resource or socioeconomic environment
- **Duration**:
 - **Temporary** – Impact is temporary or transitional, associated with a specific action or with a predictable endpoint.
 - **Near term** – Impact will begin within the next 1-10 years, and will continue in the long-term or have permanent effects
 - **Long-term** – Impact will not likely begin until after the next 1-10 years, but will likely have permanent effects on the resource or socioeconomic environment.
- **Incidence**:
 - **Direct effects** - Impact is caused by the action and occurs at same time and in the same place as the action.
 - **Indirect effects**- Impact is caused by the action, occurs later in time and at some

distance from the action, but must be reasonably foreseeable. Indirect effects may include changes in ecological processes that result in a change to the environment.

Timing: It is impossible to predict when any specific actions within either of the alternatives would be implemented. Hence the specific timing of impacts is not addressed in this EA. The timing of impacts would need to be addressed during future planning processes. For the purposes of this EA, the time frame in which impacts are analyzed incorporates roughly the next three decades, except where different time frames are specified.

Summary of Alternatives

In preparing the Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study, the NPS was unable to identify any NPS management options that satisfied all four requisite evaluation criteria (national significance, suitability, feasibility and required direct NPS management). NPS Management Policies specify that when any of these four criteria are not met, alternatives for NPS management will not be developed. Therefore, alternatives that include NPS management are not analyzed in this report. The two alternatives from the Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study that are evaluated in this Environmental Assessment are summarized as follows:

ALTERNATIVE 1: CONTINUATION OF CURRENT PROGRAMS AND POLICIES (NO ACTION):

Alternative 1 is the “no action” alternative for this study. Under Alternative 1, the NPS would take no action in the study area beyond those actions already authorized (e.g. recreation grant programs, historic preservation programs, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail). Current programs and policies of existing federal, state and county agencies and non-profit conservation organizations would remain in place and current conditions and trends would continue. Land use changes would occur, consistent with county and state decisions under zoning, the local coastal plan, and other existing regulations.

ALTERNATIVE 2: ENHANCED LOCAL AND STATE MANAGEMENT (ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE):

Alternative 2 provides a menu of programs and tools that could be pursued by the local community. It offers additional incentives for private land conservation, funds for non-NPS public and private acquisition of land and conservation easements and public access to the coast, and added capacity for existing land management organizations.

Environmental Impact Topics

Environmental impact topics were selected for analysis based on federal laws, regulations and NPS Management Policies; concerns expressed by the public or other agencies during scoping; and the relevance to the study area and to the alternatives under consideration.

The affected environment and an analysis of the environmental consequences of the alternatives are presented for each of the impact topics. A brief description of each impact topic is given below:

■ Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Includes population, housing and employment; agriculture; services and facilities; and transportation. Also addresses effects on socially and economically disadvantaged populations and public health and safety effects of dispersed residential development.

■ Land Use

Includes agriculture, prime and unique farmlands, effects of existing and proposed land use measures. Also addresses conflicts with land use plans, controls or policies; and natural or depletable resource requirements and conservation potential.

■ Biological Resources

Includes threatened and endangered species, rare and sensitive habitat, wetlands and floodplains, and the effects of existing and proposed conservation measures. Also

addresses important scientific resources, ecologically critical areas, and other unique natural resources.

■ Cultural Resources

Includes archeological resources, historic sites and structures, cultural landscapes, and Chumash cultural and sacred sites, and the effects of existing and proposed conservation measures. Also addresses historic properties listed or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, urban quality and design of the built environment, scientific resources and research and interpretation opportunities.

■ Recreational Use and Experience

Includes public parks, coastal access, trails, recreation demand, access to public lands.

■ Scenic Resources

Includes access to and views of coastal areas, the historic ranching cultural landscape and the Santa Ynez Mountains from highways, roads, railroad, coastal parks, trails, and beach access areas. Also addresses urban quality and the design of the built environment.

■ Water Resources

Includes water supply and water quality. Also addresses public health and safety issues related to water quality.

■ Air Resources

Includes air quality impacts from activities both within and outside of the study area.

Mandatory topics:

NPS policies require that several impact topics be considered and either be addressed in the EA, or else be explicitly determined to be irrelevant. These topics requiring mandatory consideration are:

1. Conflicts with land use plans, controls, or policies.
2. Energy requirements and conservation potential.

3. Natural or depletable resource requirements and conservation potential.
4. Urban quality, historic and cultural resources, and design of the built environment.
5. Socially or economically disadvantaged populations.
6. Wetlands and floodplains.
7. Prime and unique agricultural lands.
8. Endangered and threatened plants and animals and their habitats.
9. Important scientific, archeological, and other cultural resources, including properties listed or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
10. Ecologically critical areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or other unique natural resources.
11. Public health and safety.
12. Sacred sites.
13. Indian Trust resources.

All of the above topics are incorporated into the impact topics above, with the exception of the following, which have been dismissed from further analysis:

Energy requirements and conservation potential: this topic was dismissed from further consideration because no actions proposed involve direct energy requirements. Traffic and transportation issues are addressed in the Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice topic; emissions issues are addressed under the Air Quality topic.

Indian Trust resources: this topic was dismissed from further consideration because there are no Indian Trust Resources within the study area.

"Environmentally Preferred" and "Preferred" Alternatives

The NPS is required to identify an "environmentally preferred alternative" in an EA. The "environmentally preferred alternative" is the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources, and that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. More specifically, the "environmentally preferred" alternative is the one that best meets the criteria spelled out in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), section 101(b).

Alternative 2 is considered the "environmentally preferred" alternative because it best meets the NEPA criteria. Alternative 2 increases the local capacity for permanent land conservation, the potential for effective sustainable management of significant natural and cultural resources in the long term, and public appreciation of the study area. Additional discussion of the environmentally preferred alternative can be found with the summary of environmental consequences at the end of this EA.

The "preferred alternative" is the agency-preferred course of action. The NPS is not required to identify a "preferred alternative" in an EA. The NPS does not have a "preferred alternative" at this time because the actions identified in each alternative are local, state and private actions, not NPS actions. The NPS will identify a "preferred alternative" after analyzing public and agency responses to the draft Feasibility Study.

Table 8: Primary impact topics to which policies and regulations apply

Policies and Regulations	Socioeconomic	Land Use	Bio-logical	Cultural	Recreation	Scenic	Water	Air
American Indian Religious Freedom Act				•				
California Clean Air Act								•
California Coastal Act	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
California Environmental Quality Act	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
California Porter-Cologne Act (point source discharge)							•	
Clean Water Act: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System							•	
Coastal Zone Management Act	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management		•	•				•	
Executive Order 11990, Wetlands		•	•				•	
Federal Clean Air Act								•
Federal Endangered Species Act		•	•					
Fish and Game Section 1603		•	•				•	
National Environmental Policy Act	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
National Historic Preservation Act				•				
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act				•				
Santa Barbara County Coastal Land Use Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Santa Barbara County zoning ordinances	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•